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ABSTRACT

This report discusses definitional issues of behavior disorders and serious emotional disturbances and describes findings of a mail survey completed by administrators in 23 local and intermediate special education planning units and agencies in 11 states. Survey responses are summarized in tables. These present data on occurrence and agreement for state definitions of behavior disorder; and personnel involved, evaluation instruments used, and data used in identification of seriously emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted children. Frequent reference is made to multidisciplinary evaluation teams. Data most often include social and developmental histories, observation, interviews, medical and educational records, and student intellectual and psychological evaluation results. Respondents expressed the need for more rigorous operational definitions. It was concluded that despite a variety of personnel involved, there was a consistency in the overall identification process used. The greatest inconsistency among respondents centered in the need to differentiate between seriously emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted students in identification and service delivery. (CL)

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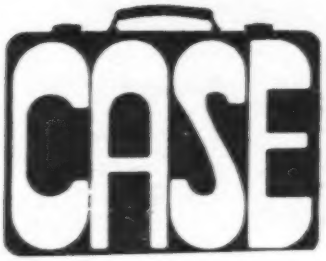
A SURVEY OF DEFINITION AND IDENTIFICATION OF SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED YOUNGSTERS: LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR PERSPECTIVES AND PROCESSES

David Greenburg



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A Report of
Survey Information
Collected for
The Council of Administrators of Special Education

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Table of Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	1
Literature on Definition/Identification Issues	1
Purpose of the Investigation	13
Procedures in the Investigation	14
Presentation of Local Perspectives/Procedures	15
Discussion of Local Perspectives/Procedures	24
Summary and Implications	26
References	29

List of Tables

Table — Page

Table 1 - Occurrence and Agreement for State Definitions of Behavior Disorder 7

Table 2 - State Policy Definitions of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed in Relation to P.L. 94-142 . . . 9

Table 3 - Personnel Involved in Identification of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Children 16

Table 4 - Evaluation Instruments Used in Identification of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Children . . 18

Table 5 - Data Used in Identification of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Children 19

Table 6 - Data Used in Identification of Socially Maladjusted Children 21

Table 7 - Differentiation in Identification of and Services for SED/SM Children 22

AN INVESTIGATION OF DEFINITION AND IDENTIFICATION OF SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED YOUNGSTERS: LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS PERSPECTIVES AND PROCESSES

Introduction

With the likely exception of learning disability, probably no area of exceptionality has prompted more discussion relative to definition and procedures for identification than that known variously as emotional disturbance, emotional handicap behavior disordered, or other similar terms. Almost current with the issuance of regulations for Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, in 1977, the process was initiated for issuing separate regulations for the identification of learning disabled youngsters. To date, such has not occurred in the area of the seriously emotionally disturbed (the preferred term for the purposes of this paper). Since there has been no further "clarification" through additional federal regulations, some flexibility has been exercised among the states and localities in defining the characteristics of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters and in specifying procedures and processes used in identifying and evaluating such youngsters.

The investigation described, reported, and discussed herein was conducted through a mail survey with the intent to prepare a brief report of local special education administrator input for one federal official and for staff of one professional association. The information received, however, and the interest in it generated by those who provided perspectives (as well as others who learned of the information collection effort) prompted the investigator to prepare a more comprehensive report than originally planned.

Literature on Definition/Identification Issues

Considerably more has been written and published on this topic than will be reported in this paper. Rather than provide an exhaustive review of the literature, the investigator attempted to select examples from the literature which typify the issues of concern to local special education administrators in designing services and programs for seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters. Additionally, some attempt has been made to maintain a focus on the definition in current federal regulations and relate other material to that definition.

The definition in current federal regulations is found in §121a.5(b)(8) of the August 23, 1977, Federal Register regulations for implementing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142):

> "(8) 'Seriously emotionally disturbed' is defined as follows:
> (i) The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:
> (A) An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
> (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
> (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
> (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, or
> (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
> (ii) The term includes children who are schizophrenic or autistic. The term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed."

At least among local special education planning units throughout the nation, there was no immediate concern expressed about the regulatory definition of seriously emotionally disturbed. In part, the silence may have been due to preoccupation with the earlier-referenced situation regarding learning disabilities and/or with the sometimes onerous task of bringing local programs into compliance with the total of federal regulations and subsequently-emerging state regulations. At the same time, as will be demon-

strated later, regulations in many states were designed in a manner which lessened the immediate local impact of the published federal definition for all matters except reporting youngsters for the purpose of generating federal dollars. The local impact of the federal definition was realized more fully when state and local budgets for special education programs became tighter and administrators of local special education planning units became more concerned with their inability to acquire federal financial support for services to some youngsters in programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed although their difficulties were not known to adversely affect educational performance and were believed based in social rather than emotional areas.

Kauffman (1980) reports that the definition of seriously emotionally disturbed which appeared in the 1977 federal regulations was derived from Bower (1969) but with the addition of saying children who are socially maladjusted but not emotionally distrubed are included. He suggests "the addition of that clause makes the definition nonsensical by any conventional logic." While stating his concern somewhat more directly than most, Kauffman raises the issue of others who support a broader definition for special education service delivery purposes. Kauffman posits that the federal choice among possible definitions does not make the selected definition better than the others, rather, it simply clarifies which definition will be used in the courts. He states "the fact is there is no clear, (unambiguous) definition of emotional disturbance." In some situations, time and experience in working with rules or regulations may allow for clarifying practices or policies to emerge, but Kauffman suggests "... bureaucratic rules often become impenetrable barriers to rational action." If "rational action" in this case is use of the most recent knowledge in the field, such may be the case in defining emotional disturbance for local services.

Reynolds and Birch (1977) discuss together condiderations relative to services for the learning disabled and for the seriously emotionally disturbed

(applying the term behavior disordered to the latter). They provide a two-prong challenge to educators in that:

> "The first is to see that they (youngsters felt to be LD or BD) receive instruction that will help them. The second is to bring some rational order into both professional and public discussions of what the expression 'learning disabilities/behavior disorders' means. The two problems are interactive; a solution to one is somewhat dependent upon the resolution of the other. ...they learn too little of the academic (cognitive) and the personal-social (affective) school (or home) curriculum to experience reasonable success educationally."

In the meantime, some local special education administrators have expressed frustrations in dealing with not only the kinds of services which should be designed for seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters and with determining the nature of the populations to receive those services, but also with the demands from general educators for removing students perceived by them to need services eventually developed. One local administrator (Surber, 1983) recently expressed his frustrations to colleagues in his state thusly:

> "In our ignorance, most of us are operating special classes for the emotionally disturbed where we bring all of the aggressive students together so they can pick up each other's undesirable behaviors. The process of placing these students seems to be like a bottomless pit because as soon as we place the 'worst kid' from some school they nominate a new student for 'worst kid,' and he then also needs immediate placement. Meanwhile, the very withdrawn child, who is likely to be more mentally ill, does not rock the boat and hence, does not get referred. They are the ones who become suicidal when they become adolescents."

While the above statement includes some situational generalization, the pressures for providing services to that child perceived by general education staff as the greatest problem or in greatest need are too often reported to be contrived; and the same may be said for the comment regarding referral rates for withdrawn children.

Two changes in the federal regulation definition for seriously emotionally disturbed were proposed in the Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) published in the Federal Register, August, 1982. One change was the elimination

of the phrase "...which adversely affects educational performance;" and the other change was removal of the exclusionary language pertaining to socially maladjusted children (NPRM 300.4(b)(4)(viii). The language pertaining to educational performance was added to the overall definition for a handicapped child, so it still applied to the seriously emotionally disturbed. As has been widely reported, however, the negative public reaction to the overall August 4, 1982, NPRM caused removal of the entire proposal from consideration. At this point in time, then, the definition of the 1977 regulation remains in effect.

Cullinan and Epstein (in Wood and Lakin, 1979) posit there may well be various definitions for serious emotional disturbance for differing purposes. A research definition might serve to clarify external validity of a study by delimiting the population to which results obtained might be applied. An authoritative definition might be intended by the author of a document to prompt controversy or discussion. An administrative definition is found in rules and regulations and either implicitly or explicitly defines the characteristics of youngsters eligible to receive services. It is the latter type of definition which most often becomes problematic, particularly when adapted or interpreted for various settings as in the various definitions currently in place among the states. Cullinan and Epstein offer that there should be an investigation of the various definitions of serious emotional disturbance which are currently in use among the states. Such investigation would seek to identify or develop exemplary and operationalized definitions for field testing in demograpically-representative areas. The field testing would permit evaluation of the limited number of definitions and, hopefully, emergence of that or those found most useful to the field.

At least one state (Smith, 1983) has initiated a process similar to that proposed by Cullinan and Epstein. The Iowa Department of Public Instruction

has utilized field input and outside consultants to develop a potentially exemplary definition of serious emotional disturbance (actually, behavior disorders) which may prove to be operational and does include identification guidelines. The proposed definition is anticipated to be adopted for trial during the 1983-84 school year; and Iowa is one of three states one federal official reported watching for possible developments with national impact.

Three recent studies of definitions of serious emotional disturbance currently in effect across the respective states have been reported (Epstein, Cullinan, and Sabatino, 1977; NASDSE, 1978; and Mack, 1980). There were earlier studies as well; but for this discussion, only those subsequent to (or at the time of) development of the federal definition were considered. While the NASDSE report is the only one of the three which contains actual definition excerpts from the respective state regulations, the other two reports contain more information relative to analysis and contrast of the definitions. The NASDSE report was most helpful as a reference while reading the other two.

Of the 49 state definitions analyzed by Epstein, Cullinan, and Sabatino (Table 1), eleven components were identified. No definition had all eleven components; rather, the range was from two to nine, and five was the most frequently-found number of components. All definitions referred to disorders of emotion and/or behavior--roughly one-third to emotion, one-third to behavior, and one-third to both emotion and behavior. Thirty-four (69%) included a component regarding interpersonal problems, twenty-seven (55%) a component for learning and/or achievement problems, and twenty-three (47%) mentioned deviations from the norm. Chronicity was mentioned in 18 (38%) of the definitions, severity was mentioned in 21 (43%), and exclusions were mentioned in 18 (37%). Special education needed (31 or 63%) and certification (17 or 35%) were used, in the opinion of the inquirers, for administration facilitative reasons rather than to document behaviors. Etiology and prognosis were seldom-found components

TABLE 1

OCCURANCE AND AGREEMENT FOR STATE DEFINITIONS
OF BEHAVIOR DISORDER

Component	Occurrence		Percent
	Frequency	Percent	Agreement
Disorders of Emotion/Behavior	49	100	76
Interpersonal Problems	34	69	71
Learning/Achievement Problems	27	55	92
Deviation from Norm	23	47	84
Chronicity	18	38	100
Severity	21	43	92
Etiology	8	16	90
Prognosis	4	8	100
Exclusions	18	37	92
Special Education Needed	31	63	96
Certification	17	35	94

Note: From Epstein, Cullinan, and Sabatino (1977).

(8 and 4 occurances or 16% and 8%, respectively); and the inquirers suggest the "state of the art" is most lacking in those areas as well.

Mack's analysis of states' definitions of seriously emotionally disturbed, completed three years following the Epstein, Cullinan, and Sabatino study, determined there were twelve states which used the definition in PL 94-142 regulations (Table 2). While some of the same criteria were found among many states, only the twelve addressed all criteria of the federal definition. Seven states were found to use the term "seriously emotionally disturbed" and eleven to use the term "emotionally disturbed." Of the 42 states using other terminology (excluding Massachusetts and Vermont, neither of which used categoric labels), "25 use emotional as a basis, 9 use behavior as a basis, 1 uses social as a basis, and 7 use a combination of those terms." Mack also found all but nine reporting states' definitions referred to duration and/or degree of the child's difficulties, and all but 5 addressed the adverse effect on educational performance. Autistic was included in 10 definitions and defined separately in 6 states. At the same time, 15 definitions excluded socially maladjusted and 3 states defined socially maladjusted separately.

Bower and Lambert (in Long, Morse, and Newman, 1965) characterize the emotional handicap as a lessening or restriction of "the individual's relative freedom of choice in social and educational endeavors." The subsequent loss of "personal maneuverability" in a dynamic environment causes difficulties in adapting to the changes in one's life. They then describe five patterns of behavior associated with emotional handicaps and offer screening suggestions through teacher observation. Bower and Lambert summarize that

> "...the significant patterns of behavior in children indicating a need for closer scrutiny by a teacher are: inability to learn, unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships, inappropriate behavior, unhappiness, repetitive symptoms of illness after stress..."

Mansheim (1982) believes it is not easy to evaluate the seriousness

Table 2

STATE POLICY DEFINITIONS OF SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED IN RELATION TO P.L. 94-142

STATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	OTHER CRITERIA
Alabama	+	+	-		-		
Alaska	+	+	-		-		Deficiencies in group participation, awareness and/or understanding of self and environment
Arizona	+	+	-		-		Social or behavioral problems
Arkansas	+	+	-		-		
California	+	+	+		-		Severe disturbance in thought processes
Colorado	+	+	-		-		Dangerous behavior, behavior interferes with learning of classmates, limited self-control, withdrawal
Connecticut	+	+	-		+		Disruption of educational development for child or other students
Delaware	+	+	-	+	x		Acting out behavior, withdrawing, defensive, disorganized behavior
Florida	+	+	-	+	-	+	
Georgia	+	+	-		-		Destructive to himself or others
Hawaii							
Idaho	+	+	-		+		
Illinois							
Indiana	+	+	+		+		
Iowa	+	+	-		-	+	
Kansas	+	-	-		x		Disregard for consequences of own actions
Kentucky	+	+	-		-		Dangerous to health or safety, disruptive to program for others
Louisiana	+	+	-	+	+		
Maine	+	+	-		-		
Maryland	+	+	+		+		
Massachusetts							
Michigan	+	+	+		+		
Minnesota							
Mississippi	+	+	-		-		Ineffective coping behavior
Missouri	+	+	-		-		
Montana	+	+	+		+		Inhibits educational rights of others
Nebraska	-	+	-		-		Neurotic, psychotic or character disordered

STATE	1	2	3	4	5	6	OTHER CRITERIA
Nevada	-	+	+		+		
New Hampshire	-	+	-		-		Those with sufficient intellectual and emotional capacity to become responsible and self-supporting
New Jersey	+	+	-		+		
New Mexico	+	+	-		-		Failure to adapt and function at grade level
New York	-	-	-	+	-		
North Carolina	+	+	-	+	+		
North Dakota							
Ohio	-	+	-		-		Can profit from instruction
Oklahoma	+	+	+		+		
Oregon	+	+	-		-		
Pennsylvania	+	+	-		-		
Rhode Island	+	+	+		-		
South Carolina	-	-	-		-		Adequate intellectual potential demonstrated
South Dakota	-	-	-		-	+	
Tennessee	+	+	+		+		
Texas	-	+	-	+	-		
Utah	-	+	-		-		Cannot be adequately or safely educated in regular class
Vermont	+	+	-		-		
Virginia	+	+	+		+		
Washington	+	+	-		-		
West Virginia	-	+	-		-		Acting out, withdrawing, defensive and/or disorganized behavior
Wisconsin							
Wyoming	+	-	-		-		
D.C.	+	+	-		-		Limited ability of individual to govern his own behavior

Key:
+ Required by P.L. 94-142 and similar language is found in state policy
- Required by P.L. 94-142 but similar language not found in state policy
x Present in state policy but not required by P.L. 94-142

1 Duration/Degree
2 Adverse Effect on Educational Performance of Child
3 Includes Autistic, Schizophrenic
4 Defines Autistic Separately
5 Excludes Socially Maladjusted
6 Defines Socially Maladjusted Separately

Note: From Mack (1980)

of any given behavior and suggests it may be helpful to view a child's functioning as occuring in different spheres (home, school, and community). The greater the number of spheres in which the child's problematic behavior is observable, the more serious the behavior. Mansheim further offers that beyond academic work, there are several areas of function in school which need to be assessed. They include attitude toward authority, self-concept expressed in school activities, peer relationships, health, and grooming and dress. Anxiety, he states, is the most frequent indicator of emotional disturbance in pre-school children.

In his discussion of issues in diagnosis for "socio-emotionally impaired" early adolescents, Morse (in Eyde, Menolascino, and Fink, 1979) expresses concern that the federal definition of emotional disturbance excludes the socially maladjusted, feeling that "allows special education to avoid responsibility for value-defective youngsters," perhaps the group presenting the most serious social problem. He adds that in diagnosis it is critical to get to know the child rather than to collect an "information bank." He further states

> "Whatever else is studied, the list should include (a) the nature of the cognitive functions...; (b) the value system...incorporated; (c) affective states; (d) self-concept/self-esteem; (e) relevant physiological conditions; (f) family role complications; and (g) social network affiliations. The study of the milieu is as critical as the study of the person."

Peterson, Zabel, Smith, and White (1983) surveyed service providers in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska to assess the types of youngsters being identified and served as emotionally disabled. "Type I ED students" were described as those behavior disordered in that they presented behavior problems only in some settings. "Type II ED students" were those considered "truely" emotionally disturbed in that they presented behavior problems in all settings. They found 70% of all students served were judged by service providers to be Type I ED. Somewhat over half of students served in self-contained classes were Type II ED (53.4%), and a similar proportion (52.3%) of students served in residential pro-

grams were Type II ED. The largest portion of students served in resource programs were considered Type I ED, but nearly half of those in self-contained or residential programs were Type I as well--and presumably less severely handicapped. The inquirers concluded that "apparently type and severity of students' problems alone do not determine delivery model where they are served..."

Schenk (1980) conducted an investigation to determine whether or not there were significant relationships between psycho-educational assessment reports and individualized education plans (IEPs) for 243 students in programs for the educable mentally retarded, the emotionally disturbed, and the learning disabled. Evaluation recommendations and IEP goal and objective statements were each assigned to one of five categories: affective, cognitive, achievement, learning patterns, and other. Statistically weak relationships were found between the evaluation recommendations and the IEP long range goals as well as between the evaluation recommendations and the short-term instructional objectives. Schenk concluded the IEPs had limited foundation in the assessment reports, hence, she questioned the extent to which IEPs addressed unique learner neads. The portion of students whose records were used and who were identified as emotionally disturbed was fairly small(28 of the 243), and no analysis of data by handicapping condition was reported. It is not possible from this study, then, to assess whether or not the assessment/IEP congruence for ED students was greater, less, or similar to that for EMR students or for LD students.

Beyond the IEP development, Knoff (1983) investigated the relative impact of 16 peices of diagnostic data upon special education placement decisions. Subjects in the study were 20 school psychology trainees, 20 special education trainees, 20 school psychology practitioners, and 20 special education practitioners. Each subject rated each piece of diagnostic, background, and demographic data using a 7-point Likert scale. The study findings indicated intelligence test data, while important (ranked 9 of 16), was not the most influential factor in

determining placement decisions. The most important factors in determining placement decisions were observations of the child in the classroom, language assessment (both receptive and expressive), child interview, and emotional indicators. No significant differences were found between disciplines or between practitioner vs trainee subjects. It might be noted that area considered most important in making placement decisions is also the area often considered most critical in the identification of the seriously emotionally disturbed.

Purpose of the Investigation

Some confusion and frustration has been reported among local special education administrators relative to the definition and identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters. In addition, there is a possible opportunity for change in the federal administration definition of seriously emotionally disturbed. The present inquiry, which was requested by an official of Special Education Programs, U. S. Education Department (SEP), was undertaken to obtain and report information on the nature and scope of problems related to the definition and identification of children classified as emotionally disturbed--problems nationally across local special education planning units. Issues regarding SED definition and identification were initially raised in meetings arranged by the inquirer (as a representative of the Council of Administrators of Special Education) to bring together local practitioners and federal officials. The specific purposes of the investigation were to identify the personnel/instruments/process/data used in identification of severely emotionally disturbed youngsters, to assess the impact of social maladjustment in the identification/evaluation process for the emotionally disturbed, and to identify major problems and potential assistance in the identification of the seriously emotionally disturbed.

Procedures in the Survey

The inquirer, as a representative of the Council of Administrators of Special Education, contacted by mail 30 local practitioners throughout the United States, all of whom were CASE members with whom the inquirer had previously dealt pertaining to this or other issues. Geographic and demographic distributions were considered. Questions posed were:

(1) How are "seriously emotionally disturbed" children identified in your local program? (personnel, instruments, process, data used)

(2) What data relative to social maladjustment is used in the process of identifying seriously emotionally disturbed children in your program?

(3) How do personnel in your program differentiate between "seriously emotionally disturbed" and "socially maladjusted?"

(4) What are the major problems encountered by personnel in your program relative to the identification of seriously emotionally disturbed children; and what assistance do you feel would help alleviate those problems?

Due to an initially-perceived time constraint, no attempt was made to field test the questions or to have them reviewed for clarity or appropriateness for eliciting the kinds of information expected. The responses received, however, indicated the questions were interpreted as anticipated. Additionally, each person contacted received only the initial memorandum request. There was no attempt for follow-up; although three telephone calls were received to inquire about the timeline for responding. As mentioned, there was initially an immediate need for responses so information could be forwarded to SEP; but the timeline was later relaxed, and those who called were encouraged to respond within any reasonable timeframe. All of those persons did submit written responses.

Written responses to the four questions posed were received from 23 local and intermediate special education planning units and agencies

in eleven states. Responses were received from the following planning units: Rochester (MN) Public Schools; Joint Independent School District #287, Minneapolis, MN; School District of Escambia County, Pensacola, FL; Colstrip (MT) Public Schools; Missoula (MT) County High Schools; Bozeman (MT) Public Schools; Park Hill School District, Kansas City, MO; Fond du Lac (WI) School District; Atlanta (GA) Public Schools; Middle Georgia Psychoeducational Center, Macon, GA; Chattahoochee-Flint Cooperative Education Service Agency, Americus, GA; Southwest Georgia Psychoeducational Services, Ocnlocknee, GA; Indianapolis (IN) Public Schools; Long Beach (CA) Unified School District; Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Newport Beach, CA; Chicago (IL) Public Schools; South Metropolitian Association, Harvey, IL; Arrowhead Area Education Agency, Fort Dodge, IA; and Cecil County Public Schools, Elkton, MD. Four additional responses were received from unidentified local or intermediate planning units.

Due to the nature of the responses (narrative form), the inquirer utilized document analysis procedures to excerpt data for reporting. Allowances were made for terminology differences to permit consideration of and analysis of response content themes rather than simple tabulation of language. No other parties were involved in the document analysis process.

Presentation of Local Perspectives/Procedures

Responses to the question "How are seriously emotionally disturbed children identified in your local program?" varied more in form than in content. In the extremes were respondents who provided lists for each "prompt" following the question statement and respondents who addressed only one of the "prompts." Table 3 presents that 17 respondents made specific reference to school psychological services personnel, 13 to psychiatrists, 5 to clinical psychologists, 8 to social workers, 9 to classroom teachers, 5 to special education diagnosticians, and 6 to school administrators. Other personnel mentioned by at least

Table 3

PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN IDENTIFICATION OF SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN

Respondent* \ Personnel	Eval. Team	Sch. Psych.	Psychiatrist	Clin. Psych.	Soc. Wkr.	Clsrm. Tchr.	Sp. Ed. Diag.	Sch. Admin	Counselor	Sp. Path.	Nurse
# 1	X	X	X		X			X			
# 2	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			
# 3											
# 4	X	X	X		X		X				X
# 5	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	
# 6		X	X			X					
# 7	X	X	X	X				X			
# 8	X		X								
# 9		X									
# 10	X		X		X	X					
# 11		X	X								
# 12											
# 13		X	X	X							
# 14											
# 15		X				X	X	X			
# 16	X	X									
# 17	X					X					
# 18	X	X			X	X	X				
# 19	X	X				X	X	X	X		
# 20	X	X	X								
# 21		X		X		X			X		
# 22	X	X	X		X	X		X			
# 23	X	X	X		X						
Totals	14	17	13	5	8	9	5	6	2	1	1

*Respondent representatives of local special education planning units randomly assigned numbers for confidentiality

one respondent as involved in the identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters included counselors, speech pathologists, and nurses. Fourteen respondents made specific references to interdisciplinary or evaluation team members with or without specifying the membership. Two of the respondents (from different states) indicated a confirmation of diagnosis of severe emotional disturbance was required by a psychiatrist before any child could be so labeled.

A wide range of intellectual, personality, developmental, and projective tests were named or referenced generically in 12 returns (Table 4). Tests specified by name included WISC, WAIS, Binet, Bender, Draw-A-Person, Kinetic Family Drawing, Rorschah, TAT, CAT, Mooney Problem Checklist, Beck Depression Inventory, Rotter Incomplete Sentences, Cattell, Denver, AAMD, Vineland, MMPI, Burkes Behavior Rating Scale, Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist, Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Inferred Self-Concept Scale, Columbia Mental Maturity Scale, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, High School Personality Questionnaire, PIAT, and Devereux. Most lists which included one of a type of tests (projective-type tests, for example) also included several other tests of the same type.

Perhaps the greatest consistency in the responses to the questions regarding identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters was the frequency with which references were made to multidisciplinary evaluation teams in discussion of the identification processes. Most often the reference was specifically to a team process or structure; and those who did not make specific team references listed a variety of personnel internal and/or external to the school (Table 3).

Respondents most often indicated (Table 5) data used in identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters included social and developmental histories, classroom and clinical observations, child and parent interviews, medical and educational records, and evaluation information from intel-

Table 4

EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS USED IN IDENTIFICATION OF SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN

Respondent* / Instruments	IQ tests*	PIAT	Achiev. tests*	Bender	Behav. rating*	AAMD	Vineland	MMPI	Col. Ment. Mat	Devereux	Denver	Project. test*	Kinetic Fam.	Draw Person*	Sent. complet*	Self report*	High Sch. Pers	Beck Dep. Inv.	Coopersmith	Infer. Self-con	Piers-Harris	Walker	Burkes	Mooney	Rorschach	TAT	CAT	Cattell
# 1	X		X									X																
# 2																												
# 3																												
# 4																												
# 5																												
# 6	X			X	X	X					X		X															X
# 7																												
# 8	X																											
# 9	X			X									X	X	X										X	X	X	
# 10	X	X	X	X							X		X												X			
# 11																												
# 12														X	X								X					X
# 13																												
# 14																												
# 15	X		X		X							X				X												
# 16								X							X									X	X	X	X	
# 17																												
# 18																												
# 19	X					X	X		X						X						X	X	X			X	X	
# 20	X	X		X						X			X	X	X							X	X			X	X	
# 21	X		X	X				X						X			X	X	X					X				
# 22																												
# 23	X	X	X			X	X	X					X	X									X		X	X	X	
Totals	10	3	5	5	2	3	2	3	1	1	2	2	5	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	5	5	5	2

*Respondent representatives of local special education planning units randomly assigned numbers for confidentiality

Table 5

DATA USED IN IDENTIFICATION OF
SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN

Respondent* / Data Source	IQ test	Psych. Eval.	Neuro. Eval.	Pers. Assess.	Soc. History	Devel. Hist.	Par. Intvw.	Fam. History	Child Intvw.	Tchr. Anecdot	Clsrm. Observ	Ed. Records	Clin. Observ.	Med. Records	Duration	Frequency	Severity
# 1		X			X	X			X		X			X			
# 2		X			X		X		X	X							
# 3																	
# 4		X															
# 5	X	X				X		X			X	X		X			
# 6		X					X		X	X							
# 7		X															
# 8	X			X	X	X			X		X	X		X			
# 9	X				X	X											
# 10		X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X			
# 11		X	X	X				X	X			X	X				
# 12																	
# 13		X															
# 14																	
# 15	X			X		X	X					X	X				
# 16		X											X				
# 17	X	X			X	X			X					X	X	X	X
# 18											X		X				
# 19										X	X						
# 20																	
# 21	X	X		X			X			X		X					
# 22		X					X						X				
# 23																	
Totals	6	13	1	4	6	7	6	2	7	5	6	6	5	5	1	1	1

*Respondent representatives of local special education planning units randomly assigned numbers for confidentiality

lectual, psycho-educational, and personality evaluations. Neurological evaluation data was specified by one respondent, as was data regarding frequency, duration, and severity of the child's difficulties.

Data relative to social maladjustment which were reported most often (Table 6) included social histories (8), information regarding the nature of relationships with others (4), adaptive behavior scales (6), parent interviews (5), behavioral observations (4), and involvement with law enforcement agencies (6). Other data mentioned included that pertaining to psychiatric evaluation, reality orientation, observed withdrawal and fearfulness, and experiences with intervention strategies attempted. One respondent specified those youngsters determined to be socially maladjusted rather than seriously emotionally disturbed were diverted to programs for the disadvantaged rather than for the handicapped. The number of sources or nature of data reported used in the identification of socially maladjusted youngsters was smaller than the number reported in the identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters, but several respondents did report the process and information sources were initially the same for either eventual diagnosis.

Respondents were split on the matter of differentiation between the seriously emotionally disturbed and the maladjusted (Table 7). Six respondents indicated no attempt was made to differentiate in diagnosis as the service delivery options were the same regardless--differentiated only on the basis of severity of the respective difficulty. Of the remainder, all indicated a determination involving differentiation was made. Of those who differentiated (17), nearly one-third (5) stated that although there was differentiation, students of either diagnosis were included in the same programs. Of the 12 respondents who reported differentiation and exclusion of socially maladjusted youngsters from programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed, 5 indicated alternative services in special education and one (cited above) indicated

Table 6

DATA USED IN IDENTIFICATION OF SOCIALLY MALADJUSTED CHILDREN

Respondent* \ Data Source	Soc. Hist.	Relationships	Adaptive Behav.	Parent Interview	Law Enfor. Invol.	Psychiatriac	Reality Orient.	Fears	Interven. Strateg.	Behavior Observ.	Same as SED
# 1											
# 2					X		X	X		X	
# 3											
# 4											
# 5		X	X	X		X			X		X
# 6			X	X							
# 7											
# 8	X										
# 9	X		X								
# 10				X	X	X					
# 11										X	
# 12	X	X								X	
# 13			X		X				X	X	
# 14											
# 15	X			X	X						
# 16											
# 17	X	X									
# 18	X										
# 19											X
# 20	X		X		X		X		X		
# 21	X			X	X						
# 22											
# 23		X	X								
Totals	8	4	6	5	6	2	2	1	3	4	2

*Respondent representatives of local special education planning units randomly assigned numbers for confidentiality

Table 7

DIFFERENTIATION IN IDENTIFICATION OF AND SERVICES FOR SED/SM CHILDREN

Respondent*	No Diff. Diag.	Diff. in Diagnosis Same Prog.	Diff. in Diagnosis Differ. Prog. Sp Ed	Diff. in Diagnosis Differ. Prog. Other	Basis for SED/SM Differentiation Delinq.	Externl Conflct	Sev/Long of Prob	Profile	Psychi. Eval.	Diag. Plcmnt.	Relatns
# 1			X							X	X
# 2			X							X	
# 3		X									
# 4				X					X		
# 5			X				X		X		
# 6								X	X		
# 7	X										
# 8	X								X		
# 9		X					X				
# 10	X										
# 11		X			X		X				
# 12								X			
# 13									X		X
# 14											
# 15					X						
# 16	X										
# 17						X					X
# 18	X										
# 19		X									
# 20		X			X		X		X		
# 21			X			X				X	
# 22	X										
# 23			X							X	
Totals	6	5	5	1	3	2	4	2	6	4	3

*Respondent representatives of local special education planning units randomly assigned numbers for confidentiality

alternative services outside special education. The remaining six were silent on the point. Bases expressed for differentiation between social maladjustment and serious emotional disturbance included information/observation of relationship information (3), conduct disorders or delinquent-type behavior (3), extent of external conflict (2), and severity, longevity, and consistency of the problem (4). Two respondents reported using checklist profiles to differentiate between social maladjustment and serious emotional disturbance, six respondents relied most heavily on psychiatrist/psychologist determinations, and four employed temporary, diagnostic placement in special education programs.

The question pertaining to major local problems in the identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters prompted the expression of concerns largely in two areas, although others were suggested. Seven respondents expressed concerns related to issues of definition and included lack of guidance regarding meaning of "severe," accurate diagnosis of social maladjustment, and tendency for the current definition of seriously emotionally disturbed to be unclear and/or subject to professional or lay interpretation or orientation. Nearly all persons expressing definition concerns (6 of the 7) suggested the solution was based in operational definitions for both "seriously emotionally disturbed" and "socially maladjusted;" and four of the six indicated the concept of reality orientation should be addressed in the definitions as a major component of differentiation. Another seven respondents related concerns regarding demands (increasing) by parents, general educators, and community agencies for special education or related services for youngsters whose difficulties are clearly social rather than emotional. Again, clearer, operational, and more rigorous definitions were cited as the assistance most needed. Five respondents stated major problems due to the time needed for diagnostic procedures, particularly when those procedures required the involvement of agencies external to the school. Three respondents reported problems in the identification of youngsters

in "the gray area," not clearly within either the seriously emotionally disturbed or the socially maladjusted context. One of those respondents suggested the use of temporary, diagnostic placements had been helpful in alleviating the problem in the school district. Three respondents also commented on local problems due to the inavailability of adequate emotional support for students receiving special education or related services in programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed. Problems cited by individual respondents included (a) discriminating between low-functioning students exhibiting bizarre behaviors and students truely prepsychotic, (b) obtaining documentation of alternative strategies attempted prior to referral for evaluation, (c) alternative schools vs residental treatment centers for the socially maladjusted, (d) standardizing systems for identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters, (e) parental acceptance of the severity of a child's emotional disturbance, and (f) evaluation of identification processes and services.

One respondent stated particularly well two examples of local special education administrator problems:

> "...one of the problems we encounter state wide is the fact that often socially maladjusted students are sent by the court system to residential programs in (the) state that are designed primarily to serve juvenile delinquents. Once in placement, there is a strong tendency to identify the students as seriously emotionally disturbed in order to tap into educational funding for that placement. The position of our district is a refusal to participate in that funding if we have not been involved from the outset and had an opportunity for our...Team to determine whether or not the district had an appropriate placement.
>
> "...we are also experiencing recently more pressure from regular education administrators within our district to identify students with serious acting-out problems as fitting under a handicap of 'seriously emotionally disturbed' in order to facilitate some kind of out of district placement. So far we have been resisting this trend but it is becoming increasingly difficult."

Discussion of Local Perspectives/Procedures

The information received from respondents to this inquiry indi-

cated there were a variety of personnel using a wide range of instruments and formal procedures across the districts in identifying seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters. At the same time, there was considerable consistency among the same districts relative to the overall identification process, the use of multidisciplinary evaluation teams, and the kinds of data used in decision making. There appeared to be nearly total reliance on the use of personnel internal to the public school systems except in those instances when a psychiatric, clinical psychological, or mental health facility evaluation was required; and when required, the perception expressed was that the external evaluation caused noteable delay in the evaluation process.

There seemed general agreement among the respondents regarding the value of the concepts of reality orientation and internal vs external focus (to the child) in differentiating between the seriously emotionally disturbed and the socially maladjusted. The same might be said for the consensus that the federal definition incorporate those concepts while being made more operational.

Of particular interest was the information provided by one-half of the respondents whether or not there was differentiation in the identification of seriously emotionally disturbed youngsters and socially maladjusted youngsters, there was no such differentiation in delivery service systems. Respondents were not asked whether or not youngsters identified as socially maladjusted and served in programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed were reported for generating federal funds. Some, however, offered that youngsters in such situations were included in federal report counts and others indicated they were not. It appeared they generally were not so reported by districts in states with authorization for local programs for the socially maladjusted, while the practice in states without separate program authorizations was less consistent.

Respondents indicated increasing pressure on local administrators of special education programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed to include individual youngsters clearly socially maladjusted only. Such pressure was perceived from parents, from school general education personnel, and from representatives of community agencies. In all likelihood, the activity of the courts in placing youngsters contributed to the situation as did misunderstanding of the definition and criteria for placement. Perhaps contributing further, however, was the limited scope of programs for dealing with such children at home, the school, and the community; and the special education system appeared to be another alternative for youngsters presenting societal problems prior to or in addition to the correction system.

Summary and Implications

The brief investigation reported herein was initiated not as a scientific inquiry but simply to surface local procedures and problems in the identification of seriously emotionally disturbed children (SED), particularly in view of the federal definition language excluding socially maladjusted children not also seen to be seriously emotionally disturbed. The inquirer, representing the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), contacted a total of thirty special education administrators throughout the U.S. to pose questions regarding SED identification procedures and problems. Written responses were received from a total of twenty-three individuals in eleven states, representing both single-district and intermediate planning units, both urban and rural settings, and various sections of the country.

The investigation was prompted, in part, by a perception that some level of confusion existed among local special education administrators relative to appropriate identification of SED children. The information collected suggested that while there was a variety of personnel involved and a similarity in data considered from one planning unit to another, there was

general consistency in the overall process used. Such might suggest little perception among the responding administrators regarding confusion about the need for multi- or trans-disciplinary evaluation procedures.

According to this survey, local special education administrators were less certain about procedures for differentiating between youngsters considered seriously emotionally disturbed and those considered socially maladjusted. The information collected suggested a consensus that a true or a contrived differentiation was possible. Most administrators based their differentiations on whether or not a child was reality oriented or displayed pathologic behaviors or on internal vs external orientation and the severity, longevity, and frequency of the child's difficulties. Such responses may be consistent with the current federal administrative definition but are inconsistent with the most recent literature in the field. Consideration for incorporating current knowledge in a federal administrative definition of seriously emotionally disturbed appear in order.

The greatest inconsistency among respondents was relative to the link between the need to differentiate between the seriously emotionally disturbed and the socially maladjusted in identification and in service delivery. While the federal administrative definition seemed clear, there were a variety of state-level interpretations; and local special education administrators employed practices which followed the variations in state definitions. This survey was not designed to surface those variations pointed out by others. A topic for further study may be suggested for the purpose of comparing and contrasting local practices among states with parallel special education programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed and the socially maladjusted, states which categorically exclude the socially maladjusted from special education programs, and states where both the seriously emotionally disturbed and the socially maladjusted are served in the same programs.

Almost without regard for the nature of difficulties encountered in local efforts to appropriately identify the seriously emotionally disturbed, a more opperational administrative definition for SED was cited as a factor expected to facilitate solution development. While it should be pointed out, again, the survey was conducted to assess current practice and interpretation in SED identification in selected local special education planning units and to surface problem areas and potential solution strategies, the issue of SED definition was suggested by respondents as both problematic and a potential source for problem solution. The criteria and procedures most often used in local settings for identifying children who are seriously emotionally disturbed appear appropriate responses to the current federal definition; but current belief would support revision of that definition. Such revision might include (1) elimination of the need for differentiation between "seriously emotionally disturbed" and "socially maladjusted" and (2) incorporation of child evaluation based upon behavior observed and described within the framework of a full description of the environment and conditions in which the behavior occurs. The consistency with which local planning units use criteria for differentiation should not serve to condone the practices in view of the debate concerning whether or not such differentiation can be authenticated.

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